U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries Program

Conserving America's Fisheries–

A Proud Past, A Bright Future

FACTS:

- **One-third of the Nation's freshwater fish species are threatened or endangered.**
- **The number of threatened and endangered aquatic species has tripled in the last 20 years.**
- **The two most significant threats to the diversity of aquatic ecosystems are loss of habitat and invasive species.**

The Nation's Fisheries Provide Invaluable Biological, Social and Economic Benefits

The Nation's fish and other aquatic resources are among the richest and most diverse in the world. These resources, and the recreational, commercial, and subsistence opportunities they provide, have helped support the Nation's growth by providing enormous ecological, social and economic benefits.

Preliminary surveys conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) show that recreational fishing contributed more than $35 billion annually to the American economy in 2001 alone. An economic analysis conducted independently by the American Sportfishing Association in 1996 showed that recreational fishing's overall economic impact to the economy was $108.4 billion, including 1.2 million jobs and $28.3 billion in personal income.

The Nation's Aquatic Systems are in Crisis

Despite efforts by the Service and others to conserve fish and other aquatic resources, a growing number are declining at alarming rates. More than 400 aquatic species either have, or need, special protection in some part of their natural or historic range. The number of species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 2002 has increased to 19 amphibian species, 21 crustacean species, 70 mussel species, and 115 fish species. Several threatened and endangered species of fish are important recreational, subsistence, and commercially species, including several species or populations of salmon, sturgeon, and trout.

A brown bear catching salmon.

The Service's Fisheries Program has played a vital role in conserving and managing fish and other aquatic resources since 1871.

The reasons for these declines are linked largely to habitat loss or alteration (including flow changes, watershed modifications, sedimentation and pollution) and the impacts of harmful exotic or transplanted species.

A New Vision for the Future

The new vision of the Service's Fisheries Program was developed in 2002 and states, "*The vision of the Service and its Fisheries Program is working with partners to restore and maintain fish and other aquatic resources at self-sustaining levels and to support Federal mitigation programs for the benefit of the American public.*"

To achieve this vision, the Fisheries Program will work with its partners to:

- *Protect* the health of aquatic habitats
- *Restore* fish and other aquatic resources
- Provide opportunities to *enjoy* the benefits of healthy aquatic resources.

John Taylor/USFWS

Our Nation's Native American communities rely upon healthy, sustainable natural resources to meet subsistence, economic, ceremonial, religious, and medicinal needs. Drying salmon in the village of Igiugig, Alaska.

A Renewed Service Commitment to Partners and Seven New Focus Areas

The Service is re-committing to its role as a partner in conserving America's fish and other aquatic resources. In some cases, the Fisheries Program will lead; in others, it will facilitate or follow. In all cases, the Fisheries Program will focus its efforts and activities on what it is best positioned to contribute based on its unique resources and capabilities, recognizing that sound science and solid partnerships will continue to be the key to aquatic resource stewardship. Working with its partners, the Fisheries Program has identified seven areas of emphasis with associated goals, objectives, and actions to focus on in the

future. The seven priority areas include the following:

- Partnerships and accountability
- Aquatic species conservation and management
- Public use
- Cooperation with Native Americans
- Leadership in science and technology
- Aquatic habitat conservation and management
- Workforce management.

Five Criteria

The Fisheries Program will use five criteria in deciding what activities, opportunities, and issues to address for each of the seven priority areas set out by the strategic vision. The Service will weigh potential actions by:

- The strength of Federal authority and responsibility
- The extent to which our efforts will complement others in the fisheries and aquatic resource conservation community
- The likelihood that our efforts will produce measurable resource results
- The likelihood that our efforts will produce significant economic or social benefits
- The extent of partner support.

Steps for the Future

The National Fisheries Leadership Conference will be held in Washington, D.C. from January 21-24, 2003. The goals of the conference are to celebrate the completion of our Vision, to transition from strategic planning to implementation and to seek the input of our partners as we move forward.

Regional Step-Down Plans will be developed with partners from January to May 2003.

Karen I. Wilk/USFWS

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1 800/344 WILD
http://www.fws.gov

For more information please contact:
Steve Klosiewski or LaVerne Smith
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
907/786 3523 or 907/786 3493
steve_klosiewski@fws.gov
or
laverne_smith@fws.gov

Visit the National Fisheries Program home page at:
http://fisheries.fws.gov/

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